

# PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE: A NEW WAY OF DOING WORK WITH INBUILT FLEXIBILITY

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*The way that work is structured and produced creates dilemmas for integrating work with the rest of life – family, friends, leisure, community activism, creativity, personal development and personal interests. The way that salaried or paid work is structured creates the kinds of communities we live in. At the same time there are large numbers of people excluded from even the possibility of decent, paid work in formal organisations, confined to worklessness and poverty. The dominant response to this is skills and productivity deficit (explanation) and skills training and development (solution). I will suggest a different way of approaching community, work and family tensions: an approach that enables communities to identify need and create work to meet these needs. This approach is known variously as part of the solidarity economy or the participatory civic economy. I will present some examples of civic participatory work developments that have the potential for community building and incorporating flexibility and family support.*

**Keywords:** participation, economy, work-life-community integration

## 1. Introduction

The role of work, and its connection with community has had little coverage in the community psychological literature, despite the connections being well established (see, for example, Bookman, 2004; Voydanoff, 2014). Recent studies have focused on the sense of community gained from working in a community-based social enterprise (Zani & Cicognani, 2012) and the motivations of child workers in Peru (Maya Jariego, 2017). Yet we know that work (which usually means paid employment) has long been seen to have important psychological consequences for people. Haworth (2014, p. 39) reminds us of the ground breaking analysis of employment and unemployment, where Marie Jahoda argued for the “centrality of the social institution of employment in providing five categories of psychological experience which are conducive to well-being and that, to the extent that the unemployed are deprived of these experiences, this contributes to the decline in their well-being. These experiences are: time structure, social contact, collective effort or purpose, social identity or status and regular activity. The wage relationship present in employment

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provides traction for people to engage in work, providing these categories of experience as unintended by-products of purposeful action, which they may or may not find enjoyable”.

Fryer and Fagan (2003) found that when people were out of paid employment and in receipt of benefits, some turned to work in the hidden or ‘black’ economy, which provided them with a sense of pride, status and respect. It enabled them to develop skills and to buy necessary items like children’s shoes. Those who remained reliant on out of work benefits, on the other hand, showed signs of depression, passivity, and feelings of humiliation and stigmatisation. Importantly, there was a lack of reciprocity, of an exchange relationship; whereas working in the hidden economy enabled a reciprocal relationship between work done, payment received and entitlement to spend as people pleased.

It is important to note, though, that studies on the psychological consequences of unemployment have been undertaken in the context of paid work being highly valued in society, leading to social status and the self-respect that comes with this (Mckenzie, 2014). If the nature of work changed, would the social value on paid work, structured as it is at present, change too?

However, it has long been shown, too, that paid work-life integration is more problematic for women than for men.

Of course some people have not been able to engage fully in paid employment, due largely to the uncompromising structure of work, which means (usually) women with small children, disabled people or those with long term and chronic health conditions are excluded from the paid workplace. Does this mean they do not work? Not only do some work in the hidden economy, as discussed above, but many people who find themselves in this situation do engage in work – unpaid work, usually of community benefit. This might include extended care work, supervisory work of young people excluded from school for various reasons and who would otherwise engage in anti-social behaviour, community activities such as organising community events, voluntary work with public services or local organisations for social benefit, and so on. In addition, those whose paid working lives have run their course, those in retirement, still maintain forms of work that give them the same benefits as paid work had done, previously.

## **2. Changing patterns of work**

In recent years, the psychological benefits of paid work have had to be revisited, due to the changing nature of work. Many of those in work, in the UK, now, do not experience all the advantages outlined for work in the past. Instead, their working lives are characterised by uncertainty, precarity and a lack of fulfilment (see Psychologists for Social Change [PSC], 2017).

Some solutions to this changing pattern of work, along with the realities and predictions of increasing automation, leading to fewer paid jobs as we now know them have included social policies around shorter working weeks (e.g., Coote, 2015); universal basic services to support those in paid work (Institute for Global Prosperity – University College London [IGP-UCL], 2017; Universal Basic Income (UBI), wherein people receive an income sufficient for basic necessities by virtue of their citizenship; and job guarantee (JG) schemes, wherein people are guaranteed, usually by the government acting as employer of last resort, paid work for the social good. Both universal basic income and job guarantee would have important psychological benefits, and may help address gender gaps in work-life satisfaction (PSC, 2017). Universal basic income, would, perhaps, mean that the unpaid work that many more women undertake than men would become more socially valued. At the same time, those currently in full time work might decide to reduce their hours and spend more time in caring

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or community building roles. At the same time, employers would have to create better working conditions for unpopular work so people would be able to exercise more choice than at present whether to accept work on any terms or not (Kagan, 2016).

However, the anticipation of the positive impact of universal basic income is speculative, whereas the job guarantee is known to fulfil more of the positive benefits of paid employment. We shall see they can also be designed to be participatory and to have a local, community building focus. The following three sections are derived largely from Kagan (2017).

## ***2.1 Job guarantee and/or universal basic income***

Tchervena has argued for the job guarantee because it would enable greater economic stability than would UBI, whilst at the same time delivering many of the same benefits as UBI (Tchervena, 2012). In support of her argument, she draws on the impact of the *Plan Jefes* programme in Argentina following the financial crisis of 2001. This was a job guarantee programme aimed at Heads of Households (mostly men), but in practice involving women too, offering 4 hours of work a day at the minimum wage. Extensive evaluations of the programme have shown the positive impact on the participants, especially on poor women who participated, beyond increased income.

The scheme enabled people to identify specific unmet needs in their families and communities and design jobs to meet those needs. A wide range of work was undertaken, including day care, public libraries, after school activities, tailoring, artistic pursuits, recreation, environmental clean up and recycling, subsistence production and other activities for the public good. After a year the program evolved into *Plan Familias*, enabling a naturalistic quasi-experiment, comparing experiences across the transition from job guarantee to basic income. Men were offered training and job placement assistance, but women the alternative of a basic income to stay at home: in the pilot area for this change, less than 50% of women made the switch. The impact on the women of paid employment included the learning of basic skills, completion of courses, boosted self-perceptions, feelings of being connected to neighbours and enhanced sense of dignity and pride: collective and individual empowerment was facilitated and women reported increased respect in their households and communities. Being engaged, doing something, helping the community, working in a good environment were all more important to the participants than their increased income. Women wanted to work rather than receive welfare payments of equivalent amounts. Tcherneva argues that income alone does not lead to empowerment: rather empowerment comes from earned income not charitable donations (the reciprocity-exchange relationship discussed by Fryer & Fagan, 2003).

Tcherneva, then, suggests that “a well structured guaranteed employment that offers opportunities for meaningful work at a living wage, counters the precariousness of the labour market by eliminating unemployment, drastically reducing poverty and enhancing the individual freedom to say ‘no’ to bad jobs” (Tcherneva, 2009, p.184). In the context of the austerity era, she suggests that such a scheme would reverse the decline in public services by focussing on socially useful outputs and public provisioning for all, thus leading to community building and increased social capital at the same time thorough the prioritising of people’s contributions to socially useful activities. By focusing on the needs of those at the ‘bottom’, she argues, job guarantee would also serve a redistributive function, improving the incomes of those at the ‘bottom’ faster than those at the top and transforming the meaning and purpose of work. Jobs that focus on mitigating the impact of climate change could also be a part of a job guarantee scheme.

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Godin (2012) modelled a variation on the JG, the Green Jobs Guarantee (GJG), in which the jobs available are in the improvement of energy efficiency for domestic and public buildings (e.g., via retrofitting insulation). In Godin's simulation, the GJG is cost effective for the State (in comparison to a conventional Keynesian demand stimulation package) and unlike the conventional JG it does not lead to boost in energy demand as a consequence, instead decreasing it. This idea fits with current Green New Deal proposals. However there is considerable debate as to whether these actions will lead to the promised community benefits of energy and consumption reduction. Burton (2019) shows how the promised energy and consumption benefits are unlikely, and that with better energy efficiency, more will be used, and that with cheaper energy, people will have more money to spend on luxury items, boosting consumption, which in turn uses more energy.

The key distinction between UBI, social security modifications or job guarantee, may well lie in the degree to which people choose work and jobs at their will or are forced to take jobs out of financial necessity.

Tcherneva does not dismiss UBI entirely, but concludes that it would be possible to combine the goals of UBI and job Guarantee. Income guarantees not tied to labour market participation (such as child allowances, old age pensions, disability allowances, healthcare) could be combined with a voluntary employment opportunity through a living wage-benefit-vacation package for those able, ready and willing to work. She calls this a 'universal guaranteed participation income programme' (Tcherneva, 2006). Participation is a cornerstone of participation income proposals.

## ***2.2 Participation income***

In 1994, the UK's Commission on Social Justice (Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR], 1994, pp. 261-265) explored the possibilities of a citizen's income, arguing for a modified version based on active citizenship, a participation income. This idea has also been proposed by the economist Tony Atkinson (Atkinson, 1996; 2015). He was concerned with reducing inequalities and both preventing and reducing unemployment, and proposed a version of basic income that replaces the 'citizen' eligibility requirement of most UBI proposals, with a 'participation' requirement. The qualifying conditions would include:

people working as an employee or self-employed, absent from work on grounds of sickness or injury, unable to work on grounds of disability and unemployed but available for work, it would also include people engaging in approved forms of education or training, caring for young, elderly or disabled dependents or undertaking approved forms of voluntary work, etc. The condition involves neither payment nor work; it is a wider definition of social contribution (Atkinson, 1996, pp. 68–69).

Atkinson's scheme grants a secure income but requires recipients to satisfy a participation requirement as a condition of support. The kinds of participation envisaged are socially useful activities, such as caring for an elderly person, volunteering in a neighbourhood project, engaging in training or studying for a qualification. The qualifying conditions would need to be approved, which in turn would require a mechanism for administering and monitoring participation activities. How, and on what basis participation activities would be approved would need to be worked out, with the obvious danger that such approval could be politically, rather than socially motivated.

The introduction of such a conditional element to the basic income is similar to the 'contribution contract' proposed by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts,

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Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) as part of their model of UBI. The idea here is that all recipients of the basic income sign a contract with their local communities to “contribute, to the extent they are able, through earning, learning, caring or setting up a business” (Painter & Thong, 2015, p. 20).

The suggestion is that such a contract will be a positive affirmation to establish norms, provide social support and underpin the contribution ethos – thereby helping to shift social attitudes values from individual success to social solidarity.

It is unknown whether or not participation or contribution requirements for a basic income would enhance community building, and whether the breach of one of the core principles of most UBI models, namely that of unconditionally, would weaken the transformative potential of the UBI or strengthen it.

### **2.3 Participatory civic economy**

There are some social experiments that have developed more participative mechanisms for local work creation that have led to more satisfying work, community building and better work life integration. These can be called participatory social enterprise. Participation is at the heart of the creation of participatory civic economies, currently in their infancy.

Rather than thinking about *national* policies and processes to alleviate poverty, austerity and its negative psychological effects, civic economies are *locally* focussed and begin with the goal of increasing social solidarity. Drawing on the work of Murray (2009), the Compendium for the Civic Economy (00:/ Production, 2011, p. 9) describes the civic economy as one designed to “unlock and share the resources we have more effectively. ... it comprises people, ventures and behaviours that fuse innovative ways of doing from the traditional distinct spheres of civil society, the market and the state. Founded on social values and goals and using deeply collaborative approaches to development, production, knowledge sharing and financing, the civic economy generates goods and services and common infrastructures in ways that neither the state nor the market economy alone have been able to accomplish”.

Civic economy approaches, then, aim to not only alleviate the passivity and isolation of current employment and welfare practices. Instead, proponents argue for innovative and new methods of co-producing society, co creating value, cost savings and mechanisms for financing or collective investment. People come together to identify local needs, design and implement projects, producing socially useful products.

The approach has been successfully trialled at a neighbourhood level in Lambeth (Britton, n.d.; Billings & Britton, 2016), and a five year programme began in Barking and Dagenham in November 2017 (see <https://www.weareeveryone.org/every-one-every-day>). This work aims to combine the benefits of peer-to-peer co-production projects, with businesses and services - working together to improve the overall wellbeing of the neighbourhood, leaving no one behind. From the start, the innovation aimed to:

- invite people to suggest ideas for projects and businesses they would like to create together,
- provide the support needed to bring hundreds of these ideas to life quickly and without any complicated processes,
- open 5 high street shops (starting with two in the first year) and a central warehouse,
- work from these core spaces with people to create projects, arrange insurances and health and safety, facilitate the use of smaller functional spaces for the projects (kitchens, workshops, storage spaces, etc.), set up websites, produce newspapers, hold festivals, workshops and business development incubator programmes.

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The purpose of all this activity is to enable people to work together more easily to improve every day life for everyone living in the borough, ensuring it's an exciting, vibrant place to live and work, to grow up in and to grow older in.

As the initiative grows and develops, the idea is that new local partners and industry will become involved, to create more and more opportunities for apprenticeships, training and work experience. These might include opportunities to learn about practical business develop, re-training or self-employment ... or ways to learn new skills in research, social innovation or design.

The projects will include sharing knowledge, spaces and resources, for families to work and play together, for bulk cooking, food growing, tree planting, for trading, making and repairing, and for growing community. The initiative is dedicated to making practical participation fully inclusive. It is based on the knowledge that 3% of people in the UK are involved in neighbourhood projects, while 60% say they would like to be. Background research has shown that many opportunities for involvement locally are designed for people with more time and confidence, and that the majority of people have very busy lives, with work, raising children, caring for relatives or managing their own health issues. The project combines community building and improvement with participatory and collaborative enterprise development, keeping money local. The areas of activity envisioned are: food; finance; collaborative childcare; manufacturing; and retail. At the time of writing, 3000 people have participated in 94 projects, and 3 new businesses have begun.

## ***2.4 Organisation Workshop***

The approach above has some similarities with the Organisation Workshop (OW), developed in Brazil (Carmen & Sobrado, 2000).

OW was developed by Clodomir Santos de Moraes, a Brazilian sociologist, elected to the Pernambuco Assembly in the early 1960's, and responsible for founding the Pernambucan Development bank. Moraes was imprisoned after the military coup of 1964, and shared a small cell with Paulo Freire. There he argued with Freire that unless people were literate about the economy and how to work in organisations, and thereby earn a living, all the critical pedagogy in the world would not lead to social transformation. He went on to found the Organization Workshop, which aimed to help people become economically and organisationally literate. The main method used is large group capacitation, in which a large number of local people come together to understand and work within organisations. They learn how to organise themselves in partnership and collaboration (learning by doing), how to think local and keep money circulating in local economies. The process has been used in lots of different places, but only twice now in the UK, at Marsh Farm in Luton (Imagine, 2016) and, in 2019, in Hastings (Harwood, 2019).

At Marsh Farm, after a great number of obstacles and interference from local agencies (New Deal for Communities) and even Central Government, Marsh Farm Outreach (MFO) managed to run an attenuated OW. They built on their own research into where the local money got spent (see Ward & Lewis, 2002) 45 people took part on events linked to the OW, motivated by a commitment to work together and to develop local enterprises, run by local people, *locally*. Whilst the OW had been going on for some time (Jenkins & Carmen, 2006), Imagine (2016, pp. 3-5) reported on its achievements following Government funding in 2014. They found that:

- Most participants felt 'excluded' from society and had been unemployed for long periods, struggling with complex problems relating to physical and mental health, housing and other family crises.

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- Those who left the process early mostly did so because they had found work
  - The OW enabled the group, who did not previously know each other, to transform a derelict field into a community resource - within twelve weeks. They were provided with the tools and materials but had to self-organise in relation to every aspect of the project – including support services like catering and health & safety.
  - Over time, leaders emerged, people divided into work teams, decisions were made, conflicts were resolved and ultimately the OW task was delivered on time.
  - Feedback from participants showed that the OW gave most participants a new lease of life – more confidence, new friendships, more skills, better life-style, greater capacity to cope, greater resilience.
  - 13 people, who had few if any prior qualifications, undertook and passed a total of 42 courses on topics like health and safety, hygiene, employment rights, customer services, finance and administration.
  - Within 2 years, 13 people (28%) had opted to set up new enterprises based on their skills and interests including: bee-keeping, a community farm, a building co-operative, a catering business, music related and IT services.
  - It was estimated that the monetary value of the social projects achieved was £1,300,000, which is substantial.

### 3. Conclusion

Civic economy approaches are of interest to community psychologists for a number of reasons. Firstly, they have been applied to areas which are economically depressed and in which people are struggling to combine work with their family lives. Rather than the community simply being a resource to support work-family lives (Voydanoff, 2004), or work being a way to contribute to the facilitative effects of sense of community, civic economy approaches integrate community with work: community is built through work.

Secondly, civic economy approaches are participatory and collaborative, local in scale and are a way to regenerate and enhance the resilience of local communities, cities and regions and change the meaning of work. Community psychologists are often concerned with resilience, but what civic economy approaches add is preparation for the challenge of the arrival more automated and alienating work, further stressing low income neighbourhoods.

Thirdly, examples of civic economy practices highlight the empowering impact of participation, as well as the sense of agency participants feel. They go beyond individual to community level empowerment, opening the possibility for new ways of thinking about what empowerment might mean in relation to work, at community level.

Fourthly, civic economy approaches have the potential for transforming gender relations and because they are self-determined, can be designed to address the challenges of work-life integration, albeit at local levels. Thus they contribute to the promotion of equality, particularly in the arena of work and income, whilst at the same time building community.

Fifthly, the ideas challenge conventional thinking about work, social protection and participation, and so offer an alternative way forward, with positive social and psychological benefits, to those of universal basic income or welfare-employment reform. With some exceptions, community psychology as a discipline has not engaged with debates about alternative forms of welfare and income protection, or of work and worklessness beyond training and access to work programmes. Thus civic economy ideas and practices lead to possibilities for community psychological exploration of their impacts, both for the people involved and for social policy.

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Those enterprises that arise from the kinds of participatory approaches outlined above, consist of things that people want to do. They blur paid and non-paid employment, and beg new questions about the meaning of work, leisure and work-family integration. Work need no longer have a negative influence on leisure, and leisure can be found in activities that are paid. Indeed, Snape, Haworth, McHugh, and Carson (2017, p.190) argue that the well served distinction between work and leisure has run its course and a more profitable analysis of how people use their time is in terms of wellbeing and enjoyment. They suggest that:

Above all, change is likely to require a new and socially shared understanding of leisure that is much more than just the opposite of work. If work is to lose its current meaning, work-based understandings of leisure must also change.

The meaning of work-life integration, locally determined, must also change as we move towards confronting the challenges that climate change and work within planetary boundaries present (see Natale, Di Martino, Procentese, & Arcidiacono, 2016). Paid employment is only one aspect of work-life integration: and we have seen that addressing a community perspective raises new and innovative possibilities to moving towards greater work-life integration. The ‘life’ side of the issue must also be considered and this will entail a critical look at how leisure, community building and household tasks (including care) will be understood and performed – both highly gendered (Kagan, 2018). Perhaps community psychologists could contribute to the field of civic economy approaches by initiating projects alongside local people, joining with projects that have already begun, and/or evaluating the impact of the approach people and their communities, and being involved in the advancement of theoretical thinking in the field.

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